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## Caring in /for Place: Old Age in Urban Nepal

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**Abstract** This chapter explores ways to consider, and possibly rethink, elderly people's positions and forms of participation in urban life in the so-called "Global South," in this case in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. A key question here is how personal relations and experiences of ageing and belonging in a rapidly and widely changing metropolitan region can be addressed and captured. Building upon discussions that evolve around concepts such as "active ageing," "ageing in place" and "age-friendly cities," but also around notions such as "public" and "private," terms largely coined in North America and western Europe, the chapter addresses their productivity—and challenges—when applied in the case of Nepal. It considers a larger field of ageing in the realm of transcultural place-making, since the contextualization includes global circulations of ideas and practices related to cultural heritage, transnational migration and urban transformation through economic liberalization. The ethnographic material collected between 2014–2016 among senior Newar residents is discussed with respect to questions of ownership, participation, and responsibility. It highlights the entangled relationship of socio-religious relations and built environment, as well as intangible heritage, seeking to stress the importance of ephemeral and interstitial spaces that do not necessarily resonate with 'global' concepts of public and private, wellbeing, and development. This way, urban transformation as well as "ageing in place" can be considered as relational.

**Keywords** age-friendly cities, urban regeneration, elderscapes, cultural heritage, environmental gerontology

## Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which we can consider, and possibly rethink, elderly person's positions and forms of participation in urban life in the so-called Global South, in this case in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley.<sup>1</sup> A key question here is how we can capture personal relations and experiences of ageing and belonging in a rapidly and widely changing metropolitan region such as this one, which ranks amongst the fastest growing urban areas in South Asia. The chapter is carried by a two-fold aspiration: one is to understand urban transformation, the other, "ageing in place." I touch upon three larger thematic fields: first, I explore the notion of the family and home, and relations to urban transformation. Second, I will discuss the use of open space, in particular, what could be defined as "public places" and everyday—as well as particular—ritual practices. Thirdly, I consider the changing roles of institutions and organizations related to the life course in an urban habitat. The data sourced for this chapter stem from semi-structured interviews with members of the older population of Newars, mainly conducted between 2010–2015.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter also responds to a paucity of research on ageing and spatiality in the Global South, particularly on Nepal (see Parker et al. 2014), and offers a recalibration of concepts of urban regeneration and active ageing that have both been coined in Europe and the USA, but circulated far beyond. It attends to two major challenges of today's world: the drastic changes related to the expanding and also unpredictable changes of demographic change and urbanization. Both are frequently considered as hazards to contemporary societies by scholars, policy-makers, economists, bureaucrats, or politicians, and have interestingly—and

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  - 2 Altogether ninety-two people were interviewed in Patan between January 2015–December 2015, eleven people being under sixty at the time of interviews, the others ranging between sixty and one hundred years. The majority of informants are Newars, male and have lived in Patan for several generations, and still live at home, often in a joint family setting. Interviews were assisted or conducted and translated by historian Rajendra Shakya (in Newari, lasting thirty to ninety minutes). Many interviews were conducted in semi-public resthouses (*phalcā*), or in the interlocutors' homes, offices, or shops in Old Patan. First names have been abbreviated.

surprisingly—rarely been related to each other. While the increasing share of aged populations across the world is often shaped in a “statistical panic” of burdened national economies and welfare states, the rapid urbanization, particularly in the “Global South” is often associated with apocalyptic visions of the “slum / dog city,” informal, unplanned, and “out of control” (Roy 2011).<sup>3</sup> Based on ethnographic fieldwork (2014–2016) and mobile methods (such as walk-alongs, see Kusenbach 2003, 2012), this study incorporates debates from the field of Environmental Gerontology and Age-friendly Cities. I propose that as much as elderly persons can be understood as care-takers and place-makers of urban environments, and thus should be seen as an important resource for urban regeneration and sustainability, the city, too, can be challenged by considering it as “caring” towards (rather than simply “acting upon”)—or sidelining the needs of (at least some of) her citizens. By this, I do not mean that “age-caring” cities must imply criteria identified by policy-makers, but rather that they are listening to and engaging in relationships with civil groups.

The chapter is concerned with the question of how elderly people are shaping their habitations and are shaped by it. I argue that people of advanced age play a foundational role in a city, and in their neighbourhood in particular, by taking care of (or neglecting) it in several ways and across diverse scales, in a very creative and productive way – something that has also been attended to in recent research on “creative ageing in the city” (see Chong and Cho 2018). Thus, we might want to speak not only of age-friendly cities but also of “city-friendly ageing”: caring for old age can be a fundamental and yet intangible resource for urban regeneration, place-making, and community building. I should underline that by saying so I push the role of old-age beyond the often-naturalized “exotic fascination” with memory-as-museum, where the aged become “authentic” signifiers of a taxidermic past that seems to vanish from the surface of our speedy lives and is allowed to be “exhibited” and thus “survive” in designated spots and performances. In the case of my research it became clear that this potential of “ageing in place” might vanish, true, if it is not recognized in time and in space—but fixing it as “museumized heritage” does not help much if it does not facilitate looking differently at urban place-making through active ageing as a meaningful and productive energy for the future.

The research locale of this ethnographic inquiry was the old historical part of the city of Patan, inhabited by circa 120,000 people, mainly of the ethnic community of the Newars who have dwelled in the Kathmandu Valley region since the thirteenth and fourteenth century AD; they consider themselves the indigenous population of the area (see Gutschow and Kreuzmann 2013; Thapa, Murayama, and Ale 2008). Though having transformed quite dramatically, especially since the devastating earthquakes of

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3 Statistical panic is a term coined by Woodward (1999, 185).

2015, the locality still consists of over one hundred courtyards with with more or less actively used monasteries (*bāhāḥ / bahi*). But it is also made up of narrow alleys, larger and smaller shrines, brick and cement houses, as well as public rest houses (*phalcā*). Besides the earthquake, urban change has been fast forwarded due to the strong influx of Nepalis from outside Kathmandu Valley (including returning transnational Nepalis), economic liberalization, and changing notions of well-being and time-pass in the city, especially among younger members of the aspirational middle classes (Liechty 2003; Brosius 2014).

## Age-friendly cities

Several research fields impacted this study, ranging from environmental gerontology to urban studies and policies. Environmental gerontology calls for an expansion and deepening of person-environment research with respect to ageing, describing it as an old but empirically still under-researched concept of gerontology (Wahl 2005; Phillipson 2004; Smith 2009). With its interest in “ageing in place,” place attachment and human-environment relations-based environmental gerontology has, in a conceptual sense, emerged particularly strongly in the 21st century. The attention paid to the qualities and politics of the “spatiality of aging” (Rowles and Bernard 2013) is mirrored in a recent volume on environmental gerontology which calls for “increasing sophistication in understanding older adults’ experience of their environment”, arguing that this theme has still been sidelined, but that it is crucial in terms of understanding elderly people’s experience of belonging and homeing, as well as to relations and qualities of private and public place, mobilities, and everyday life (Rowles and Bernard 2013; Phillipson 2010). This, I argue, also allows for insights into place-making practices and urban regeneration as well as reflections on sustainable planning and inclusive cities policies. These factors permit us to read the city and urban change through the eyes and experiences of elderly. They foster an approach that acknowledges and is sensitive to the meaning of place to older adults. But it also pays attention to the ways in which age and ageing practices impact place-making and transformation. To avoid a static and dichotomous relationship between people and places, the concept of *elderscapes* seems best suited, as Annika Mayer and Roberta Mandoki also underline in this book, to consider a multi-scalar, relational set of experiences, histories, and practices that shape “ageing in place” as well as place through ageing, that pattern mobilities and social potentiality. Rather than emphasizing demographic shifts, social security, physical mobility, and safety or health care for the theme of ageing in cities, where elderly populations are generally in need of care, the chapter shifts the focus on old age as a caring resource for urban regeneration but also for gerontological research (see Kruse 2017).

## From age-friendly to caring cities

The second central subfield is that of the “age-friendly city.” The term goes back to 2005 when the World Health Organization (WHO) started an age-friendly city initiative for both developing and developed countries. This initiative studied the experiences of older people living in urban communities and identified the key characteristics of an age-friendly environment in terms of service provision (for instance, health services, transportation), the built environment (for instance, housing, outdoor spaces and buildings), and social aspects (for instance, civic and social participation) (see WHO 2007). In 2010, the WHO launched the *Global Network of Age-friendly Cities* in an attempt to encourage implementation of policy recommendations from the 2007 project. The resulting report responds to the global impact of demographic change, with a range of housing and community needs emerging among those over fifty.<sup>4</sup> However, it predominantly focuses on accessible and affordable health, participation, security, and on “aging in place” as something made up of quantifiable forms of built, natural, and social urban development (Plouffe and Kalache 2010, 734; Chong and Cho 2018). Based on the assumption that “[p]opulation ageing and urbanization are two global trends that together comprise major forces shaping the 21st century” (WHO 2007, 1), data were sourced from older residents in over thirty-five cities across the world. The report also considered itself a guide to a city’s self-assessment in terms of community advocacy, seeing “older people [...] [as, CB] a resource for their families, communities, and economies in supportive and enabling living environments. WHO regards active ageing as a life-long process shaped by several factors that, alone and acting together, favour health, participation, and security in older adult life” (WHO 2007, 1).

Interestingly, the term is gaining currency at the same time that studies and policies on the subject of plans for “creative,” “smart,” but also “inclusive,” and “safe” cities move to centre-stage of debates on global cities. One may argue that this is so because increasing numbers of people will live in cities of the future, while, likewise, the demands to respond by means of providing enough resources to those strivers becomes more overwhelming, almost impossible. Yet, these new urban transformations and

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4 Since the late twentieth century, developing countries are ageing faster than developed countries (see Plouffe and Kalache 2010: 733). In Nepal, the demographic shift has been taking shape more clearly since the early millennium. In the 2010s, over 2.3 million senior citizens above sixty were counted in Nepal, about nine percent of the population. The report “Study on Demographic Changes in Nepal: Trends and Policy Implications” predicts that by 2028, Nepal will be an “ageing society” with seven per cent of the population above sixty-five. That figure will double by 2054, making Nepal an “aged” society. The speed of ageing will be much faster than in countries like France (115 years), UK (forty-seven years) or Germany (forty years) (see Awale 2017). But Mandoki also stresses that for over sixty per cent of senior citizens in Nepal, there is no concept of “retirement”, moreover, much work is unpaid.

social influx—many of them highly mobile, fragile, and exclusive—pose challenges to the ideals of predictability and sustainability. The concept of age-friendly cities understands older people as a resource for thriving cities and proposes that if the balance between ageing and environment is struck, the well-being and active ageing of other generations may also be nurtured. This is also based on the more recent realization that an unpredictable and unforeseen number of people will live and age in cities, something that poses major challenges to societies, governments, insurances, and health systems. The report suggests that cities can act like human beings. The question, however, is who—or how many—is “the city,” and whether specific players can be defined, such as local civic bodies or NGOs that share interests and resources, and who is bypassed or overemphasized in such a mapping process (Buffel and Phillipson 2016, 96).

Old age often gets compartmentalized—with the effect of sidelining agency—in a similar way as “poor” and “deprived” marginalized slum-dwellers, for instance, are fixed as categories. Moreover, old age is often victimized. Both elderscapes and age-friendly cities help to challenge this view, placing emphasis on resourcefulness as deeply appreciated unless it romanticizes and thus overshadows scenes of exploitation and exclusion. The term “senior citizen,” introduced to Nepal in 2006, changed perceptions of old age by pulling it out of family confines and private realms and into a more proactive perception of participation in civil society and national values. However, the use of the term citizen, though legitimate in terms of national citizenship and certain rights to monthly allowances<sup>5</sup> or health care, overshadows the fact that this form of identification is not yet broadly translated into practice. In the case of my fieldwork, the strongest focus was on the direct social environment, family, kin, neighbourhood, and other, local terms of referring to an elderly person’s status and active role in societal and ritual tasks which co-exist (e.g., *āju* and *āji*, for men and women respectively)—but are often blended out by secular policies and modernist discourses.

That cities would consider ageing populations as important resources for their functioning and growth is possibly not yet that widespread in the Global South. However, the concept allows us to address themes and issues for urbanizing Nepal that could not otherwise have been brought centre-stage. Furthermore, they also help to reposition age-friendly in a less developmentalist and Western context. I propose that people of high age are a crucial source and resource for urban care and caretaking. Particularly the devotional (Hindu) concept of voluntary service (*sevā*) could be used as a tool for reciprocity and urban regeneration. It is a quality less present in a younger generation of Nepalis who might nurture a different sense of public responsibility and participation, which also speaks of a different quality of belonging to the city—or belonging to a different city. This, in turn, may enable a more differentiated and less “top-down” approach to the ways in which “elderscapes” are spelt out and help address issues such as public and private

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5 The monthly old age allowance is NPR 500 (ca. €4).

space, tradition, development and modernity. To hold on to a linear transformation would, of course, be misleading. The concept of the age-friendly city must thus respond to different aspirations, assets, and experiences of ageing generations and groups across the life-course, as well as temporalities that also reflect ritual cycles and practices, agricultural as well as service-based networks, and the emerging consumer landscape with leisure time and spaces, to mention just a few. With respect to elderscapes, such a view seems pertinent because it allows us to consider different mobilities and practices of place-production and place-use (see Sheller 2014), at times distributed across age-groups in the life-course: “Cities are, for the most part, spaces that are imagined and structured with a younger, working age demographic in mind. Older people are not, typically, incorporated into the mainstream of thinking and planning around urban environments” (Handler 2014, 12). The quality of speed, temporality, and attention shifts to the younger populations, who seem to hold more “urban currency” in their hand, that is, the potential to translate different forms of capital into a prospering city. The elderscape, thus, is an interstitial, multi-layered, and multi-temporal urban fabric that resonates with variations of aging communities. Though modernism and developmentalism, two dominant narratives of global cities in the South and the North<sup>6</sup>, are vital motors of urban transformation, we must focus on less “noisy” and quantifiable aspects. Here, the UN Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, formulated in 2002, seems ample:

Population ageing and urbanization are the culmination of successful human development during the last century. Older people are a resource for their families and communities, and for the economies in the cities where they live. However, to tap the potential that older people represent for continued human development, cities must ensure their inclusion and full access to urban spaces, structures and services (Plouffe and Kalache 2010, 734; see also de Pauw 2017).

There is an interesting correlation in the focus on urban ageing since it joins challenges of developmentalist progress (Nep. *bikās*) with challenges of providing and defining well-being: “to be sustainable, cities must provide the structures and services to support their residents’ wellbeing and productivity. But critics of age-friendly cities also argue that,

[...] [a]t the same time, age-friendly efforts should focus not only on changes for current cohorts of older residents, but also work towards long-term neighbourhood change that can benefit successive cohorts of older residents. There is therefore an urgent need to reconnect urban regeneration policies with strategies that support resident-led planning for ‘lifetime neighbourhoods’ or ‘ageing

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6 For a critique of the concepts with respect to urban planning and theorizing, see Robinson 2011.

friendly communities' [...]. Such models promote the empowerment of residents of any age to bring about neighbourhood changes which enable people to meet their basic needs, maintain significant relationships, and participate in the community in meaningful ways as they grow older (Buffel and Philippon 2016, 98).

As important as this might be for a city context in the Global North, it does not satisfy the Nepalese context. Here, we have different concepts of neighborhood, of family, of the "glue" that ties groups together, which is still very much caste and profession, but also ritual, though again, these should not be understood as compartmentalized "entities." And we have different patterns and rhythms of relating to places and spatial practices. Thus, this chapter proposes that age-friendly cities can also facilitate more attention paid to the creative potential of ritual practices and ritual places as rendering a different quality of time and space meaningful for citizens in a locality. Seeing rituals as intangible heritage allows us to perceive of old age as a resource for alternative dimensions of well-being and place-making and asks us to see elderly people as a resource for urban regeneration, resilience, and sustainability (see also Sheller 2014).

## Patan and Newar cultural domains

The Kathmandu Valley is made up of three capitals of Hindu kingdoms: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan (also known as Lalitpur, or Yala; but the term Patan will be used here for this is what is often referred to by locals when mentioning the historical part; Lalitpur exceeds the boundaries of the old city and, today, has the administrative status of a submetropolitan city). Some historical sources trace Patan's origin to the sixth century AD, others claim it is much older. Over centuries, the valley was—and still is—strongly influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism, with a unique mixture of Hindu and Buddhist elements particular to Newar culture. But there is also a unique urban history in the valley, with fascinating links to bordering China and India, and beyond, as well as an equally unique presence of "rurban" structures in that there is a strong presence of farmers in the cities, which impacts the relation to land, but also manifests in rituals and social relations. Nepal was part of a feudal Hindu theocracy and remained substantially detached from Islam or European colonialism. It has been both secluded and immensely porous along its borders to Tibet, China, and India, through lively trade-routes, craftsmanship, architecture, and art. The main local ethnic group, the Newars, have impacted the fundamental structures of the three royal cities in Kathmandu Valley in different ways. With the opening of Nepal's borders in 1951 for tourism, the first road in 1956, the arrival of television in 1985, and the inauguration of Tribhuvan airport in 1955, tourism, foreign aid, and diverse infrastructures successively entered and were built up in the country. These changes awoke



keen interest in preserving and vitalizing the “old” rituals and places, partly seeing them as “their” heritage, or as a means to promote tourism, or as something new altogether (see Liechty 2017; Toffin 2013). In a country where a civil war, a rather inert state apparatus, dependence on international aid for the lack of a strong infrastructure in terms of health, traffic, or electricity and water supply, as well as education have created a “shaky trust in government institutions and representative democracy” (Nelson 2011, 215), internal and transnational migration using the Kathmandu Valley as transit space has led to diverse pressures on urban fabric, and also on predominantly Newar neighbourhoods in the old city of Patan.<sup>7</sup> In such a context, to demand from a city to be age-friendly is possibly asking too much. But the discussion seems to be a very productive lens to use in order to look at urbanization and ageing as well as a need to reposition such “universalized” discussions triggered by, for instance, the WHO (where neither class nor caste nor cultural particularity are considered).

Kathmandu is one of the fastest growing metropolitan regions in Asia: the National Population and Housing Census of 2011 shows a growth from circa 150,000 inhabitants in 1954 to 2.5 million people in 2011 (Rimal 2018). While the pressures on life in the Kathmandu Valley increase and modern residential and commercial buildings and townships emerge, offering life and work to a host of people from across the country, there are pockets of urban life that have been able to retain intangible and tangible heritage (for instance, Bhaktapur, Bungamati, Khokana). Patan, the former independent Newar kingdom, and now part of the urban sprawl, is certainly the most dynamic and fascinating “island” (Nelson 2015). There has been rapid suburbanization and peri-urbanization since the 1970s but this has been increasing in speed and number even more since the end of the civil war in the first decade of the new millennium. In all this splintering transformation, Old Patan’s fabric remained comparatively stable until the early 2000s, but has since then been undergoing substantial demographic change, out-migration, particularly of younger people and, finally, challenges faced through the 2015 earthquakes.

## Being at home and in the city: relocations

In this section, I address intergenerational, migratory, financial, and topographic transformations and concerns related to old age and home. The role of house ownership in Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu Valley as the central source of investment, stability, and wealth also in the absence of other “secure” property or forms of investment, must not be

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7 About 50 per cent of Nepal’s households have at least one family member with transnational labor experience. Central Bureau of Statistics, *National Population and Housing Census 2011: Household Tables* (Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, 2014), 315; see also Mandoki, in this book, fn 28) and Dhital, Chalise and Rupakethi 2015.

underestimated (Mishra 2017; Nelson 2013). The house is one of the few secure forms of capital, with a steadily rising value, besides being symbolically relevant for family constitution and intergenerational life: “People invest their life in one house, and when it goes, there is nothing left”, says artist and art teacher Sujan Chitrakar, who observed that people were traumatized after the earthquake because they started to get scared of their houses, had to sell their fields, or/and take on high debts to rebuild (in conversation with Nadine Plachta, May 2015). Next to this, possibly, is the access to education and work, for which Nepalis pay immensely high amounts of money, also often causing life-long debt.

The residential house constitutes the household, regulates social relations beyond the building itself, and can—if we do not consider new neighborhoods such as condominiums—be seen as intimately related spatially and over the *longue durée* through kin relations, occupational patterns, festivals, and rituals. A household is usually headed by the grandparents, and this also considers Old Patan, where the majority of Newars that have been interviewed for this chapter reside, and where joint family setups are still in the majority.<sup>8</sup> Traditional occupations like farming, pottery, craftsmanship, religious occupations (priests) are still followed by means of generational inheritance, though young people are increasingly seeking other occupations that follow a career and lifestyle model rather than the heritage of their parents and ancestors. Living in a city like Patan and Kathmandu has become relatively expensive; rents and property prices have increased, especially since the end of the Civil War in 2007, and particularly after the 2015 earthquake. Moreover, many young people are forced or aspire to seek education and work abroad. Thus almost every household has at least one family member that works abroad, sending home remittances to further finance the family, particularly children’s education (see also Ahlin and Brijnath, in this book). Investing in new houses or improving the living conditions in old houses is a major means of showing success achieved abroad and caring for the future of the family. This has also led to abandoned old family homes because a new house was built outside the old town, forcing elderly people to move with their children, or to be left behind (Kunreuther 2009).

In Old Patan, many elderly people still live in a joint family,<sup>9</sup> households that are (and have been) in flux due to changing economic status, labor conditions, and social change. The “classic” setup is for elderly people to live with their son/s and their daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Even though as per law, all children, including daughters, should inherit the

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8 On India, see the discussion on the alleged decline of the joint family with respect to ageing, in Lamb 2013.

9 According to the Central Bureau of Statistics around 120,000 people live in Old Patan – the majority thereof belonging to the Newar community. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Population Ward Level, Lalitpur Metropolitan City, 2017* ([http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/2017/Population\\_Ward\\_Level\\_753\\_Local\\_Unit.pdf](http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/2017/Population_Ward_Level_753_Local_Unit.pdf), accessed May 26, 2018).

same, the son looking after the parents often gets a larger share, while a married daughter who has “already” received a dowry, would most likely receive a smaller or no share (Kunreuther 2009, 548)—one may argue that this also impacts parents’ ageing patterns and the urban fabric since they would hardly age with their daughter. Painting a fairly traditional image of family life and filial piety, researcher Rajendra Shakya affirms:

In the Newar family, I guess it’s all the same with all the Nepali families as well, [...] a mother and a father has to be taken care of by a son and his wife, the daughter-in-law. But if you have to go to live with your daughter and her son-in-law, the parents might feel awkward. Even if the son-in-law wants to have his mother-in-law, they are reluctant to stay at the daughter’s place (Shakya, email conversation with author, March 2018).

In patriarchal conservative settings, the daughter’s parents-in-law would rarely be willing to share property and other resources with their daughter-in-law. All income generated by the daughter generally goes to her new family from the moment of marriage, property stays on the sons’ side to keep it “in the lineage.” Rajendra Shakya continues:

If an elderly couple has only daughters then their property goes to the daughters. ... if there is one particular daughter who is fully looking after the parents, she gets all the property. ... When the daughters are married off, it is difficult for them to come and take care of their parents regularly. And the parents do not move into the daughters’ house. ... So the elderly people would rather stay at their own house and maybe have someone like a maid to look after them, while the daughters come visit them frequently (Shakya, email-conversation with author, March 2018).

From this viewpoint, there is only little freedom of choice for ageing parents: they will preferably live with a son (exceptions being that they are childless or have no son). T.M. Awale (aged seventy-seven) and B. Awale (aged seventy-eight) are two friends from Old Patan, both potters and still working in their occupation. They elaborate on the challenges of sharing often limited space on an everyday basis, and the possible tensions that can emerge, as T.M. Awale spells out: “In a family, one has to understand this—one should not say ‘my daughters-in-law are angry’ or ‘my grandchildren are irritating.’ Sometimes I also have to be humble. Only then they will respect me” (Rajendra Shakya, in conversation with T.M. Awale and B. Awale, January 2015). He has passed on all his property to the children and feels that this puts him in a precarious situation. Awale stresses that other ageing parents decide not to pass on the inheritance in order to remain strong and be treated respectfully: “you should also give them their share of inheritance. But then, once one does that, they stop giving the

respect," says T.M. Awale to B. Awale, and laughs. The former is grateful that his daughter-in-law still treats him with respect, that she follows the unspoken rule of filial piety, that is, the acknowledgement of younger family members' respect for the aged: "We are all happy together. I have distributed everything to my sons. I also have to be a bit humble. And then my daughters-in-law come and tell me 'Bhāgi yāe ti'<sup>10</sup>." The modes of exchange and affirmation of respect have to be negotiated and are tested time and again in terms of the rules by which respect is traded as social glue or friction. The display of respect can vary in credibility and efficacy, and reveals many layers of emotional and symbolic vulnerability, sacrifice, and aspirations. The temporal and societal boundaries may vary according to the context, even though the parties involved would depict it as "given" and "stable."

Filial piety (see also Michaels, in this book) is not always the highest value in decision-making processes, especially when the perspective of the ageing parents is concerned, who may feel sidelined and hurt. Moving out because a son has decided to leave the parental house (and sell or rent it) is sometimes the fate of aged parents, as in this case. After refusing to do so for many years, my neighbor at Patan Darbar Square, a lady in her early eighties, was finally moved out of her husband's family house because her son had built a modern house in a new neighbourhood outside Old Patan. Even though she was lonely during the daytime, she had felt happy previously, cooking for the children in the morning so that they could take their lunch to work, then spending many afternoons in the sun on her roof terrace, dozing, chatting with neighbors across rooftops, and performing rituals. The rituals and the proximity of key shrines to her (within eyesight since she could not walk anymore) were the reasons given for her reluctance to move house. Many children—now adults—would seek to move out of what is often perceived as too narrow, dark housing, with low ceilings, no access for parking, no symbols of "modern living." But she also did not get along particularly well with her daughter-in-law. For the younger generation, space and lifestyle matter: privacy and seclusion take up new meaning. The density of the many courtyards and close housing, where families know, see, and hear each other because of close daily interaction, but also membership to the same caste and ethnic group is now considered "too close" by many young adults. Their decision to buy land outside, in the splintered sprawls of former fields, and to live among members of the "same class" rather than the "same caste and kin" underlines a strong desire to free themselves from the felt social surveillance in the "old town." This perception does not necessarily align with that of aged parents and grandparents who do not necessarily experience the social intimacy as claustrophobic. Their "urban" habitus speaks of a thicker entanglement of work, religious practice and social exchange than that of their children and grandchildren.

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10 Asking the elders for blessing by bowing down in front of them, as a sign of filial and highly gendered piety.

Close to Patan Darbar Square lives S. M. Joshi, ninety-six years old and a well-known scholar of Newar history and culture. He also inhabits an “old” house, probably around one hundred years old, set in a typically Newari garden with brick walls, a pomelo tree, vegetables, and other fruit trees that provide their owners with eatable and ritual food. When his children moved out after marriage, he decided not to move along:

We, who are staying here, are like the fish in water. We don't think much about the change of our environment; we are not that concerned about it too. What we say is this is all because of the changes brought by the time [...] the modernization. For instance, here in my own house, I have this land and house. I brought in the daughter-in-law. Then my son had children. I could give them one room. Then the children grew up. Now the question was: where to let them sleep? Not just here, even there in the West, too, it is a great problem. Whenever the children grow older, they try to go somewhere; they leave the house. Or, they think of rebuilding the house in a new way if they have the money and land. Hence, they will not rebuild the house in a traditional structure, as they need a modern toilet and kitchen. This leads to the changes (in conversation with the author and Rajendra Shakya, March 2015).

Joshi refers to the fact that traditional houses might have an outside toilet. Bathrooms included in a residential house are a recent introduction, and because there is no running water, and they still fetch the water from the well, “bucket baths” have to be taken on the roof terrace or in the courtyard and garden, with little privacy. This is now increasingly perceived as backward by the younger generation and new houses come with indoor bathrooms and toilets (even if running water is scarce).

People also left their houses in old Patan after the 2015 earthquake, even if they were still standing, fearing their collapse and another earthquake. Yet many elderly persons refused to leave, despite the risk and the perceived low housing qualities. I tell Mr. Joshi about my neighbour, a Newari lady in her eighties, whom I used to chat with when we both spent time on the sunny roof terrace. Over many months, she told me that her son had built a modern house in a new neighbourhood on a plot of land outside the old city. His wife and daughter had already moved there and even he spent the nights there, sometimes coming “home” to spend time with his mother who could hardly walk and refused to leave for many years: she wanted to be able to perform rituals close to the temples opposite and in the surrounding area. For her, being able to look at the temples alone was a blessing. I asked Mr. Joshi to comment on the refusal to move to a new neighbourhood, where, at the most, newly built shrines could be found:

It's *saṃskār* (cultural heritage) that she is talking about. Take my wife, for instance. My son has a new house. My elder son built a new

house. And he asked his mother, my wife, to come and live there. It's a modern house. "Why do you sit here in such an old house?," he would say. But the main thing is that it is the cultural heritage. And: she loves to be here with the relatives. They come here and just talk. So she does not want to move. [...] But my son still asks: "Why are you sitting here? We have so many facilities in the new house— toilet, bathroom, and all sorts of things. You live here in such a poor place." But still, we are here. As you have already said, there are so many deities here. We worship, that is one main attraction. That is a heritage, it is a spiritual legacy that attracts us. So, we don't want to go here and there. We are satisfied with our own style (in conversation with the author, March 2015).

During my fieldwork, I could sense a particular temporality and mobility connected to the much-appreciated proximity to deities and ritual practice. I understand this as a form of "active ageing," a place-making based on the mobility of elderly (but also younger) people around dawn, even before. Often equipped with plates filled with ritual objects, such as flowers and vessels with water to sprinkle on the deities, women go for these morning walks, on their own, or in groups. Men, too, or married couples take the morning walks around the old city of Patan, to greet the deities and get blessed, listen to devotional singing (*bhajan*) but also to do a little exercise and buy vegetables. The places visited can be confined to the shared monastic courtyard (*bāhāh*), but mostly a longer walk connects shrines and temples along a fixed route. This activity, spanning several hours, is a unique, crucial form of urban caretaking of the city, her deities, and food-vendors, charging it with social and ritual energy. This way, the close relationship between caretakers and places creates a habitat of an age-friendly city and city-friendly ageing. Ageing and place-making enforce each other as resources for a very specific kind of *flânerie*, well-being, and communication. In my view, this voices a special form of shared public ownership and responsibility. Hence, the ritual morning walks contribute to and reposition the conventional form of age-friendly cities defined by Buffel and Phillipson who argue that one

factor influencing the development of age-friendly cities concerns the control and ownership of public space. The policy of developing age-friendly cities makes a number of assumptions about access to, and ownership of, public space: namely, that it can be controlled and influenced on behalf of the changing needs and expectations of people in later life. But space in cities is not itself freely available. Increasingly, ownership and control are vested in particular groups for whom the issues raised by the age-friendly agenda may have limited appeal (Buffel and Phillipson 2016, 97).

Placing their research in secularized contexts, the authors might have overseen the resource of religious ritual as an intangible and yet also “solid” form of ownership, control, and ecology of visibility. They have also sidelined the fact that another landscape of place, where occupying and place-making is possible, takes place, literally and temporally. However, considering such intangible heritage conveys the need for cities, at least in the Global South, to consider stakeholding as a central motor for the age-friendly city in another way, and to see this as a “voice in decision-making processes relating to urban developments and regeneration” (Buffel and Philippon 2016, 98).

The relationship between people and their environment is shaped by urban transformation. The span, scale and scope of daily activities and routines differs substantially, as can be seen in the ritual walks of elderly people and the reluctance to move out of their homes. This personal context is impacted by the urban transformation since the 1960s, the move from monarchy to democracy, from an agricultural, craftsman-based, and trading society to a service-oriented consumer society has impacted family relations, labor patterns, the need for other educational skills, and demand for land (see Mishra 2017). From one generation to the next, whole occupation patterns, social relations and cultural practices have been transformed, come to an end, been replaced, or at least dramatically diminished (see Liechty 2003; Toffin 2013), something that has much affected elderly people’s belonging and association with places.

Besides outmigration of many family members, in-migration (due to poverty and civil war or the search for work and education) from outside the Kathmandu Valley has been mentioned. It has pushed up property prices but also improved infrastructural conditions (e.g., access to water, electricity) of certain neighborhoods in parts of the city. Family structures have changed due to transnational migration mobility and the intense investment in childrens’ education (see also Ahlin, Brijnath, and Gamburd, all in this volume). A. Shrestha, Chief of the Social Welfare Division of Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Office, recalls how the situation for many elderly people has changed over the years:

A lot has changed from the past for the elderly people of the core area. In this 21st century, the children mostly go abroad. The children have stopped taking responsibility of the family. We all know that. Not just going abroad but also sending the children to hostels has increased. There is a vast difference in the nature of children brought up in the family and those sent to hostels. The children sent to hostels do not have any love (for the family members). This has created a lot of problems for the senior citizens (in conversation with A. Shrestha, February 2015).

He continues:

The main problem is there is no one at home. The children are all abroad. Daughters are given away in marriage. Usually, people have only one child and many of them try to go abroad. So just the parents are left back there. They cannot work at that stage and the children are not together. And this has forced them to go and live in the old-age home (*br̥ddhāshram*). This is not part of our culture, where everyone lives in the family (A. Shrestha, February 2015).

Shrestha sees this as “westernization,” while he also alludes to the fact that “Western” people look towards joint family systems as an ideal. Clearly, he oversimplifies the cultural divide, yet his comment underlines the effect of transnational migration on local structures. While outmigration of younger family members has affected residential structures, urban densification, too, plays a role. The growing dynamics of people leaving and coming have changed the city, and the way of life in certain neighborhoods. People from the locality profited from the price hike; old houses were pulled down and replaced, and additional houses were built. We return to S.M. Joshi, who alerts us to the following:

This is the quarter of the *Jyāpus*, inhabited by farmers. [...] The prices of land skyrocketed. There is an influx of people from outside. For instance, the people working in the Middle East came back with a lot of money; they took over the whole area around Nakhipot. The people with the money bought all the land there. This is the case of the area outside (the old Newar settlement). They built modern houses over there. Here, too, people sold their land. [...] This brought in a lot of money. [...] You can just take a look at here in my neighborhood. I'm living in an old house. All the houses here have become new (this is before the earthquake). Once I could clearly hear the animals from the zoo cry from here.<sup>11</sup> Now the city has been densely populated, nothing can be heard now (in conversation with the author, March 2015).

This reference to the changes in the urban landscape also refers to the fact that inner-city densification and land plotting are taking place by which farmland is sold and converted into residential land, with brick or cement houses of four to five floors' height (while a traditional home would not be higher than two to three floors).

## Place-making and old age in public: mobility and inertia

How does the physical environment impact the subjectivities and everyday lives of ageing people? How is the public aspect of a city occupied by different ageing generations? What role do ritual practices and places play in

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11 The zoo is outside the confines of the old city of Patan, but within walking distance.



this context? One of the most unique and yet sidelined sites in contemporary urban Nepal that helps us considering this are the resthouses (*phalcā*). There is no other space that is as public, dynamic, and available for multiple uses, and for a variety of social groups, as this arcaded platform. As the nodal points of Newar culture, *phalcās* have a meandering history, often undergoing architectural and social changes. Many also have a daily rhythm that invites use by different local groups. It is a ritual site, a site for gatherings and leisure, used as shelter, shop space or storage (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, p. 136). But it is also a site that, in some cases, has been closed down by means of a fence, and silently vanished through conversion into a residential place. After the earthquake, it has been seemingly rediscovered as a supportive institution, a much-needed island of momentary relief and solidarity. *Phalcās* are places that are semi-public and religiously or ritually used. The resthouse is also a social space for everyday gatherings, mainly of elderly people and children. With a few exceptions, the “middle” generation does not seem to pay attention to the relevance of the *phalcā*, and many people are not familiar with them, especially if they are from outside the valley, even outside the historic centres of Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, or smaller towns like Khokana and Sunaguthi. Even the communities located around the *phalcā* may not cherish this institution any longer and allow it to be encroached, privatized, or dismantled. This way, this age-friendly social and ritual gathering site, where leisure and ritual merge, gradually disappears. As K. Maharjan, in his seventies, and having spent much of his life playing devotional music (*bhajan*) recalls:

In the past there were many, also many *hitis* (stone water spouts) and *ja:rhum* (drinking water tank with one or more outlets from which people can drink water).<sup>12</sup> They were installed by our ancestors. These days, people have become mean. The chiefs of the government authorities also transferred the (*guthi*<sup>13</sup>) lands to their own name and built houses. There were so many ponds but they are no longer in existence. All of those people (in government authorities) including the ministers are no good. Ministers and kings are all no good. After these leaders came, everything has gone haywire. It's difficult to make a living. There is no money for the elderly. After all, we need money to eat. We have to survive (K. Maharjan, in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, January 2015).

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12 On the water architecture of Kathmandu Valley, see Furukawa, Shrestha, Bajracharya and Ogasawara 2010.

13 The word derives from the Sanskrit *gosthi*, meaning an “association” or an “assembly,” see Toffin 2005. It refers to initiatives that take care of the establishment and restoration of temples and Buddhist shrines and monasteries. Some are compulsory, some optional (Toffin 2005, 3), and they can be found across castes.



Figure 1: Atah Phalcā, an arcaded rest-house in Cyasal, Patan, where women use to gather in early morning hours, after lunch, or in the afternoon, to talk, rest, enjoy the sun, or prepare for feasts and rituals.



Figure 2: Two elderly women seated in a shop selling fabrics in a phalcā in Patan.

This quote underlines the fact that the devotional activities related to everyday life—genuinely intergenerational until a short while ago—have been pushed sideways by a different temporality of labor and leisure life as well as a declining interest of the state to invest in religious community life. Joshi stresses the fact that this also diminished the scope of elderly participation in public life and neighbourhood activities.

The research conducted for this study perceives *phalcās* as nodal points and constituents of urban neighborhoods. They follow a particular temporal ecology of place-use and this way offer members of different ageing groups, even jointly, space to gather, exchange, and nurture relationships. In response to the WHO report on age-friendly cities that underlines the importance of rest places (WHO 2007, 13) to relax, recharge, and socialize, the *phalcās* are a central element of urban regeneration and sustainability for an age-friendly city of the Global South. They are looked after by local stakeholders, often the eldest of the community. From the perspective of social and cultural regeneration in post-earthquake Nepal, the *phalcās* prove to be as significant as, or maybe even more, important than ever. Not just as vernacular sites of intangible and tangible heritage, but also as supportive institutions, especially for less visible and more vulnerable groups for whom they are a much-needed island of momentary relief and solidarity. While some *phalcās* still lie in ruins, other *phalcās* have been rebuilt, again, mostly through community initiatives which could mobilize state subsidies, or with the help of private organizations and donors. The practices related to *phalcās*, mainly devotional music, also reveal intergenerational contestations, spatial transformation and challenges of active ageing in the city, thus underlining the relation to environmental gerontology and age-friendly cities discussions.

### Intangible heritage: storytelling, music-making and exchanging in public

Exploring elderly persons' ritual activities opens access to more than questions of belief and tradition. It speaks of the transformation of social—especially intergenerational and neighbourhood—relations, work and spatial transformation, and gestures towards the porosity of private and public spheres. It also shows that a sense of privacy, as shared in European or North American contexts, does not necessarily prevail in Nepal, where the family has not become an icon of national growth and progress as in the bourgeois Global North. One could differentiate between qualities of cultural heritage that impact more and less on the self-perception of Newar communities in the Kathmandu Valley where old age plays a distinct role as stakeholder and important resource of cultural production. There is what I call “five star” heritage, made up of pagodas and temples that have been declared monuments of cultural heritage by the UNESCO or the Department of Archaeology (DoA) of the Nepalese government. But

these rankings, though they might bring in much financial capital or tourist attention and also lead towards an appreciation of traditional architecture and care for those sites, do not necessarily overlap with the prioritization and usage of locals. Many important active shrines and temples lie outside the trails of the world cultural heritage map, and remain invisible to many outsiders. Elderly persons are vital caretakers of them and connect them through their “alternative” trails. The landscapes and practices that make those buildings visible have their own temporality and are strongly linked to the morning walks mentioned above. Whether or not this can be defined as temporary public space is debatable, because it is also a personal religious fact of everyday life. Among the sites that play a larger role in the early mornings patterns of movement is the unique architectural structure of the *phalcā*. And connected to it are the *bhajans*, the devotional music played according to a sacred temporality. Many research conversations with older age members with a Newar background circulated around the *bhajan* as a sensorium of the changes mentioned, and the role of old age in nurturing this form of cultural heritage.

## The outdoor living room

The arcaded resthouses called *phalcā* are part of a semi-public religio-architectural ensemble made up of actively used and connected shrines, sometimes temples, or a Buddhist monastery, such as in the case of the Jyābahābahī, which was badly damaged by the 2015 earthquake. The earthquake interrupted many social and ritual activities that used to take place in these sites. The restriction of access to these sites brings to the fore their relevance, which is usually a presence taken for granted. H.K. Maharjan, aged seventy-four, a wood carver by profession and playing the flute in the *bhajan* group of Jyābahābahī remembers the days of his childhood:

Children used to play on the *phalcā*. We stayed there when it rained. People used to sit on the *phalcā* and the elderly people used to tell us stories. We sat there and listened. They talked about history and legends. So, the *phalcā* also served as a place for gaining knowledge. Once it got dark we stayed on the *phalcā*. A straw mat would be laid on the floor. Some of us used to sit on the lap of our father and chat. The sittings like that mostly involved gossips and also consultations regarding serious matters. [...] And when people came back from their early morning visits to various shrines, they gathered there (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, September 2016).

The experience of this intergenerational place as a site of knowledge production deserves highlighting. M.D. Maharjan (aged seventy-eight) stresses that it was also a place for people to spend time if they were out

of work. And his friend, K. B. Maharjan (aged seventy) emphasizes the shift of one living-room to another, more private one:

In the past, the houses were small and not good. People returned from work and the *phalcā* was like a living room. Everyone used to come and sit here. But these days, the houses are getting better. So people stay home. The TV is there now, there is not much interest in the *bhajan*: there are so many things to watch on the TV! (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, January 2015).

The *bhajan* practice, too, is undergoing changes, and this affects the use of the *phalcā*. Shyam Gopal Maharjan, aged forty-six, mourns the fact that *bhajans* are not popular among youngsters anymore:

The youth do not show interest in learning. [...] we organized a *bhajan* training, calling every household here to participate. We all studied and also handed over the certificates. But those who had learnt also forgot performing *bhajan* as they did not give continuity to what they had learnt. [...] *Bhajan* also used to be a means of entertainment in the past. There was nothing else to do after returning from the fields. So, people would sit on the *phalcā*, chat with each other, and perform *bhajan*. But these days, everyone's life is full of struggle. Financial issues surface no matter whatever one wants to do. This has forced people to focus on earning money. I think that is the reason. I mean, we haven't been able to bring changes in *bhajan* as per the changes in time (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, September 2016).

This quote hints at the view that the practice of *bhajans* must be reformed to fit the aspirations but also practical demands of the younger generation who, for instance, cannot sacrifice their work schedule to the demands of ritual time, and find it unnecessary to do so. The comment also stresses the collision of two temporal patterns: the one of ritual time and that of secular working and educational ecologies.

There is a particular spatial pattern behind the practice of *bhajan*. Until recently, the Maharjans, Newar farmers from Lalitpur/Patan were divided among forty quarters (*tvāh, tol*), writes Toffin, and adds that these territorial segments, also *guthis*, had their own music houses (*mañkāhchē*) where apprentices were trained and music could be rehearsed (Toffin 2005, 17–18). Increasingly, however, younger men pull out of *guthis* since they feel these associations regulate and demand too much. Even if they are keen to share with and pay respect to the older generation, the often very strict rules imposed are not identified with any longer. The demands for musical competence, too, are very high and elaborate, and request much investment in terms of time and attention. Nutan Sharma, historian of Newar cultural heritage elaborates that *bhajans*, especially the *dapha bhajans*, are very

difficult to learn. It takes years for the music to be “internalized.” Moreover, members of a *bhajan* group must commit additional time during special ritual periods where *bhajan* must be played, for instance, in the temple of the Rato Matsyendranath for six months, every morning between 5–6 am. And ritual timings cannot easily be shifted according to one’s personal or work-related needs and desires; they are linked to auspicious moments set in a ritual calendar. Moreover, while previously there would have been up to fifty people for the special performance of *Nasaṃcā Dāphā Bhajan*, now many also abstain from coming, says another *bhajan* player from Patan, P.L. Maharjan (aged seventy-eight), because they do not know how to sing and are embarrassed. Now there are about five people left. Previously, he goes on to recall, *bhajan* groups would also compete with each other, and feel motivated because it had a good reputation. Now the investment in learning mantras and spending extra time are not considered rewarding any more. This is in contrast to a revived interest of Jyapu youth in joining traditional music groups with a less demanding schedule, organized by the *Jyāpu Samaj* (the association of the Maharjans of Lalitpur, which is a reformist move stemming from the 1990s to solidify porous structures),<sup>14</sup> and including girls and women too. On this matter, P.L. Maharjan underlines that people are not ready to invest their energy in things that seem “too complicated,” and sees with a certain regret that particular practices vanish because of that, turning rituals into less complex events:

We used to have a *kajīchē*<sup>15</sup> in the past, when everyone used to gather there in the evenings after the dinner to sing the *bhajan* and play the instruments. Now, the *maṅkāḥchē*<sup>16</sup> has also disappeared. The gurus who can teach have also passed away. So, it appears as if there has been no attempts (at learning *bhajan*) at all these days (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, November 2015; see also Toffin 2005, 30).

A key interest, according to another senior citizen from the locality, is to meet for *bhoj* (a feast based on a communal meal). A group conversation with Maharjans from Lūchē Nani, Cābāhāḥ, reflects the decline of ritual diversity:

C. BROSIUS: *What is it that you cherish the most when you think back of your past? When you think of*

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14 *Jyāpu Samaj* is a community-based organization, established in 1994 for the collective development of peasant communities in Lalitpur District.

15 *Kajī* is the main coordinator of any event or activity. *Kajīchē* is their residence, where they teach playing instruments and singing *bhajan*.

16 *Maṅkāḥchē* is a form of community building usually found in *Jyāpu* localities. This social unit performs all the community activities including teaching musical instruments and organizing feasts at *maṅkāḥchē*.

*the past since your childhood till now, what is it that you enjoy the most in your life?*

M. D. MAHARJAN: *The jātrās are no longer there like in the past. The festivals are only for eating now. When Matayāḥ,<sup>17</sup> Gunupūnhi<sup>18</sup> came in the past, we used to have khyālah<sup>19</sup> (taken out on the streets) for a whole week. All of that has ceased to exist. The jātrās of gods have started to disappear. Otherwise, we had Mahālakṣmī Jātrā.*

R. SHAKYA: *Oh! The one in Lagankhel?*

M. D. M.: *Yes. Goddess Bālakumārī of Kvāchē used to be taken out for a procession, the deity from Sikabāhī used to have her procession too. All of them have ceased to exist.*

K. B. MAHARJAN: *Because of the availability of all sorts of things on TV, the interest of the people has decreased. Not even one out of twenty youngsters would want to learn these days. It's difficult; one has to work hard a lot (to learn). They have in a way lost the courage to learn.*

M. D. M.: *It was all done for the sense of pleasure in the past. Now we need money.<sup>20</sup>*

The reference to money is relevant. It underlines the effects of several reforms during the past decades that led to a centralized organization of *guthis* into the body of the *guthi samsthan* (nationalized and centralized association of *guthis*). With the *guthi samsthan*, agency was shifted away from individual groups, and the state refrained from providing money to ensure the survival of ritual and cultural heritage. Today, some of the more complicated rituals cannot be financed anymore and recede or vanish. This also restricts the activities usually held in hands of senior persons, thus decreasing their status and reputation that usually comes along with old age.

The *phalcās* (semi-public arcaded rest houses) represent another logic of mobility and sociability: they are spaces for inertia, they offer moments of slowing down, of hanging out, watching life pass by, yet remaining a part of it—a “Nepali” kind of *flânerie*. Thus, they are ideal for children and old people. The focus on speed allows us to also bring in the coevalness of multiple qualities of mobility, since today, roads are widened to make space for more cars, demanding the removal of *phalcās* and private homes

17 Literally meaning a procession of light, *Matayāḥ* is a day-long walk through the inner parts of Patan with the participants offering various materials to all the Buddhist shrines and monasteries of the city. There are ten localities in Patan which take turns, one after another, to host the procession.

18 The full moon day of *Śrāvana*, when Newars drink *kvāti*, a liquid mixture of grains and lentils (like beans and mustard).

19 Mostly exhibited during the festivals like *Gunupūnhi*, *Sāpāru*, and *Matayāḥ*, it is an urban street drama, with comic and satirical elements.

20 Excerpt from group conversation with M. D. Maharjan (aged eighty) and K. B. Maharajan (aged seventy-one) from Lūchē Nani, with Rajendra Shakya and the author, November 2015.



Figure 3: Ongoing preparations for a procession to the stupa of Pimbaha, Patan, with senior members of a ritual association (*guthi*).

from the surface. The definition of leisure has changed too, requiring other symbols of one's presence and status. The *phalcās*, quite like the *bhajan*, seem to have fallen "out of time," overtaken by a younger generation that considers them "too slow," different to what they consider "classy." But there are exceptions too, such as the community at Pimbahal, a neighbourhood with a large water tank framed by with three *phalcās* that had collapsed or been damaged by the 2015 earthquakes. Now, in 2017, the community has reconstructed the *phalcās* with support from the municipality, and the site has become a place of pride and much attention (Fig. 3). In the mornings and evenings, children, youth and old people go for walks, sit, and simultaneously enjoy the public space. Other examples of *phalcās* reconstructed through local initiative, and with financial support from private donors and the municipality point to a possible new appreciation of "the old" and a smooth conversion into a space that is also valued by the youth. As the head of the Social Welfare Division of the Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Office, A. Shrestha says:

Since about a decade or so, there has been a growing awareness on maintaining and preserving such *phalcās*. There was a phase in the past when they were misused and destroyed. The local body is carrying out renovations of them these days. Recently, one *phalcā* near Sundhārā was about to be destroyed. But the municipality provided NPR 1,000,000 [circa €8000, CB] to rebuild it this year. So, gradually the attempts at preserving them has grown. Not much can be done



for the ones that have already been converted into private property. But the municipality is moving forward with the concept of preserving the ones that still remain (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, February 2015).

This can be read as an attempt to create age-friendly cities. The local municipal body even set up a separate branch for the preservation of culture and heritage (however, the procedures are fairly bureaucratic). Communities must also contribute money, something not always easy for them. Shrestha continues: "The concept behind this is to develop a sense of ownership in people towards the public spaces. Plus, the consumers' committees are temporary. They are set up only for the construction, and do not take responsibility for conservation" (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, February 2015).

Renovated heritage sites such as *phalcās* also face intergenerational competition in the search for communal space in a densifying city, stresses Shrestha:

It is good if we can involve senior citizens in conservation of such heritages. [...] of course, they will not be contributing financially, but if we can tell them that these heritages are for you to use, they will also have love for such spaces. The problem here is the youths renovate them and they use it to form clubs. They tend to take control of the space, thinking that they are the ones who made it. That is wrong. If we leave it to the senior citizens, tell them that it's theirs to use, they will sit there and chat. They will be talking about the past (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, February 2015).

Where public space is a rare and yet aspired resource, appropriation and alteration might happen. Shrestha sees a very recreational aspect in thinking of the presence of old age persons in public spaces, since they turn the places, if we think along the lines of age-friendly cities, into thriving places, where old age becomes a resource for the future wellbeing of the citizens:

And if we can record their talks, it will be great. They will have space to talk. Some people do tend to disregard the talks of the elderly people. But it is from them that we learn about our culture. [...] Now, I came to know of this (he refers to a particular ritual, CB) and I told you. You will tell someone else. This is how such information is spread. That's why one should listen to the old people. One should not disregard the views of the old people. We are starting to witness the change in the society. If we are unable to effectively manage the changes, it may turn out to be very bad. Even the *Jyāpu Samāj* is constructing an old age home. As a consequence, old people will be dumped there. Keeping them there just because there are facilities is very bad. I'm not very happy about that (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, February 2015).

## Caring duties: *guthis*, senior citizen societies, and old age homes

Both environmental gerontology and the concept of age-friendly cities require a careful analysis of how the relationship of persons to their habitat is structured by means of built environs (in our case, the home but also the *phalcā*), as well as social groups and associations. The fact that the concept of the senior citizen in Nepal is less than two decades old also explains that senior citizen organizations are a recent phenomenon and mostly contain the secular realm and civil society. They look after their members' access to health care, their monthly allowance, and other rights that consider the well-being of aged persons. Old-age homes, and even more so, day-care centres in Nepal are a recent phenomenon, even though the concept of the "abode for the aged" (*brddhāshram*) is part of the culture of ageing in South Asia, yet in that traditional trajectory, it is usually confined to religious charity, selfless service (*sevā*, *samajik sevā*) and organizations (see Lamb 2013, Mayer 2017; Mandoki and Michaels, in this volume). Senior homes and day-care centres have surfaced in the early 1990s, with the concept of the senior citizen, and are a predominantly urban phenomenon in Nepal. In Patan, a unique form of association that is predominantly monopolized by elderly men deserves attention because it is highly urban, responding to social and urban transformations and providing elderly persons with a cause for action in the form of service and duty that simultaneously transforms them into caretakers of the city. This final section will first look at the *guthi*, then the senior citizen society and the old-age home.

The centrality of the *guthi* was highlighted earlier. With gerontologist Andreas Kruse's words, one could call a *guthi* an extended form of neighbourhood or kin (Kruse 2017), something that activates personhood—and thus also ageing—beyond the family and the state.

*Guthis* make up a central part of the "symbolic organization of the city" (Toffin 2005, 8, and 16–17), further connecting towns, quarters, and villages through intricate social and religious relations, many of them reciprocal. As Toffin writes: "These associations are of tremendous importance in the traditional society and culture of the Kathmandu Valley. Basically, they regulate several aspects of Newar social and religious life, and even possess economic functions in some limited cases." (Toffin 2005, 4). After the nationalization of *guthis* in the 1920s under the umbrella of the *guthi samsthan*, according to David Gellner, many private *guthis* declined (Gellner 1992, 235). This was also due to the fact that members were not able to chip in the money needed for rituals, and the corporation denied them money. However, the monarchy of the Hindu Kingdom still provided support to the corporation, thus also ensuring a thriving ritual life in the city. A more drastic cut came with the civil war and the transformation of the country from monarchy to democracy and civil society in the early 21st century. One could argue that yet another step was the economic liberalization in the new millennium,

and changing relationships between the emerging mega-economies of India and China between which Nepal is sandwiched. New labour and education patterns, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, contributed to a decline of younger members within the *guthi* structure. Some *guthis* responded through adaptation, for instance, by giving more agency to the young men, instead of “naturally” privileging the old members (*thakalis*, *aji*, see below). This, evidently, also shifts the position of elderly persons in their life-course patterns and social status, it impacts their role as keeper of rituals and thus also caretaker of the city, of the neighborhood / quarter.

But duty and voluntary service still play a role; the duty to care by means of voluntary service is a foundation of a special urban habitus and knowledge owned especially by elderly people. This allows them to connect sites and events, practices and people. The older a person is, the more responsibility and authority s/he holds for performing rituals and taking care of spaces. Albeit, due to the fact that the *guthis'* power decreases due to lack of donations and remittance, the burdens on status-holders also weigh more heavily, thus diminishing the reputation of a formerly honorable position. One challenge, according to M. D. Maharjan is that some sons of those involved in *bhajan* and certain *guthis* stopped caring about the *bhajan* performance after the death of their parents. Their withdrawal, either because of outmigration or disinterest “is one pathway to the *guthi* extinction” (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, November 2015). Another is the role of land, religious topography, and collectively versus individually owned property.

The urban transformations partly go back to a dramatic land reform act in the 1920s and another one in the 1970s (Gellner 1992, 235). Through ownership of land and houses, *guthis* were able to generate capital (rent, harvesting taxes) that was invested in rituals and renovations of religious buildings, even shrines, *phalcās* or houses. One's membership to a *guthi* requests regular participation in festivals and also in contributing to financing or paying service to the activities. They hold land in order to extract land revenues to finance rituals and religious buildings:

In the last twenty years, with land values rocketing in the Kathmandu Valley, many quarrelsome and / or apathetic *guthis* have had their land registered by the tenant, or embezzled by one of their number, and rapidly sold. Much *guthi* land has been lost to the building of new roads or other projects, particularly the ring road, with scant compensation. On the other hand, cohesive *guthis* with active leaders have in some cases become very rich because land they owned happened to be in what had become an urban area: by selling it (from one quarter to one third of the selling price goes by law to the tenant) and banking the proceeds the *guthi* has ensured itself a regular income to hold its rituals and feasts (Gellner 1992, 234).

Gellner differentiates between death *guthis* (residential), *guthis* ensuring worship of a particular deity, lineage deity *guthis* (residential, strong regulation of members), caste council *guthis*,<sup>21</sup> economic *guthis* (such as the oil pressers, Manandhars, or the farmers, Maharjans), and finally, youth club *guthis* (Gellner 1992, 235). Public utility *guthis*, according to Gellner, “ensure upkeep of wayside shelters or temples, to keep water fountains (*hiti*) in good repair” (Gellner 1992, 236). After the land reform act of 1964, rituals depended more and more on personal donations, says historian Nutan Sharma (in conversation with the author, March 2018). Newar heritage expert Rajendra Shakya adds that, initially, *guthi* land was not allowed to be sold. In the 1970s, the government introduced a legal reform by which land could be sold which led to large amounts of land to be sold, and some *guthis* trying to retain money from those sales in order to allow for rituals to be financed (since the state did not pay for them any more). However, there are also rumours about black money and corruption (email conversation with the author, March 2018).

The vibrancy of ritual practice or the state buildings thus shoulders on a semi-religious form of civil society that claims and commits to responsibility by ownership of land. This directly impacts the tangible and intangible fabric of the city.

## Dutiful care-habitat

Belonging to a place and a social environment is strongly shaped by personal commitment and ownership (as well as dissociation and neglect). The willingness to invest in functioning spatial and social or religious relations and practices is often defined through the notion of duty as part of one’s habitus and contribution to one’s kin’s well-being. In South Asia, such duties hold together ritual patterns and social groups, and are defined through the religio-spiritual concept of *sevā* (voluntary service). Generally, *sevā* would mean the service for a deity, and not expect reciprocity. Many duties vary according to social status and thus also age. In the context of this research on habitat and age-friendly cities, they can also be seen as the catalyst of social relations (mostly within a locality largely defined by caste or/and ethnic association) as well as a nourishing quality of care towards particular places. Thereby, care for place must not be confused with caring for a litter-free space—there are many paradoxes with respect to understanding the acceptance of material dirt in streets while much is invested in beautifying temples, statues, or even wayside shrines. This observation stresses the need to rethink public space, shared ownership and participation in South Asia along the lines of a more diverse pattern of belonging and place-making.

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21 This form is relatively rare, found among the caste group of Chitrakars or Ranjitkars; see Gellner 1992, 237.



Figure 4: A group of locals playing bhajan (devotional songs) in the courtyard of a Cā bāhāḥ, a monastery that was badly affected by the 2015 earthquakes. Due to the damages, the group can not use the space in which they usually gather and play music—an arcaded resthouse outside of the monastery. The *phalcā* was reconstructed and inaugurated in March 2017 (with German support: Mohr Foundation, Hamburg / Helpnepal, South Asia Institute Heidelberg).

The importance attributed to serving more than just individual aspirations is expressed in a group discussion with members of a Maharjan locality next to an old Buddhist monastery in Cā bāhāḥ and a *phalcā* used for *bhajans*, both badly damaged by the earthquake of 2015 (Fig. 4). While the situation had already been vulnerable before the disaster, the aftermath brought to the fore heightened effects of rupture and distress. The *bhajan* group as a solidaric agent served as a moment of resilience after the crisis, and in the light of rapid urban transformation. In November 2015, we learnt that the younger generation had no major interest in continuing the practice of their fathers and grandfathers, and of the impulse of the older members of the community to hand the traditions down to the younger generation and to inspire them to invest and serve, also in order to stabilize their own community's status. As P.L. Maharjan, aged seventy-eight, says:

The youngsters are not interested and they don't try to learn. ... Take me, for instance, I could not attend yesterday's performance because I have asthma and it's really cold. So, if we keep it (*bhajan*) alive, people from the community will recognize us as *bhajan* performers and good people .... With the display of the photos, others will also come to learn *bhajan* to have their photos on the wall too. That may happen (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, November 2015).

The photos he refers to were taken in the context of the curated walk for the international PhotoKathmandu festival in November 2015, for which portraits of the *bhajan* players were taken and mounted onto lightboxes, then fixed onto the walls of the dilapidated *bhajan phalca*, Lūchē Nani, Cābāhāḥ.<sup>22</sup> The photos, along with recordings from the *bhajan* previously played, were to remind of the practice-on-hold. That this had become part of an international festival became a source of pride for many neighbors, and a source of hope that the youth of the neighbourhood would reinvest interest and appreciation in the doings of the “aged.”

Status and practice are closely connected. There are several terms for elderly persons, besides the “senior citizen,” which is hardly used in the vocabulary of the interlocutors to this research. There is the *thakali* (old member), then there is *āju*<sup>23</sup> and *āji*, for men and women respectively. These terms also relate an older person to his/her environment and define the relation of caretaking and investing, for instance, in helping to renovate a monastery or temple. Gellner explains that a Buddhist monastery can be regarded as a kind of *guthi*, “duties are determined in rotation through lineages (*kawah*)” (Gellner 1992, 248), not through individuals but the unit of membership is the household. Old people relate to the quarter, but also to individual sites in terms of looking after the renovations. But some people also look after the handing down of traditions such as particular songs, performances, and the related rituals. In 2015, B. Awale (aged seventy-eight), had already held the responsibility in the *guthi* of performing the *puja* of the *digudya* (lineage deity) for a decade. The duties change according to a person’s hierarchy of *ājus*. There is a linear ranking of old persons in a *guthi* that can be made up of more than twenty “oldest” male members in a community. T. M. Awale, for instance (aged seventy-seven), is “climbing the status ladder” and is proud to announce that soon he will be *nāya: luigu*.<sup>24</sup> Ha:bāhāḥ has almost three hundred members; of these, there are eleven *thakali ājus*, most of them above seventy years. Goldsmith S. R. Bajracharya (seventy-four) takes up the sixth position in the ranking:

The first *āju* carries out all the *pujas*. The second *āju* helps him as *jaemām* (sponsor of *puja*, in this case the second *āju* acts as the sponsor for the collective *puja* of the *bāhāḥ*, as the presence of a sponsor is necessary in such *pujas*). The third *āju* looks after the annual income of paddy. As the fourth and the fifth *ājus* are not well

22 See <http://www.photoktm.com/2015/exhibition/the-pati-project>, accessed August 4, 2018.

23 Senior/elder of the *bāhāḥ*. Mostly in major *bāhāḥ*, there are ten *ājus* locally known as Daspāramitā Āju. When one of them passes away, the *āju* next in line will replace him while a new *āju* is inducted as the tenth *āju*. The induction of *āju* is done based on the seniority in terms of age.

24 The ritual of inducting a senior as the chief of any *guthi*; Rajendra Shakya, in conversation with T. M. Awale, December 2015.

these days, I am looking after all the accounts, along with funeral guthi, and other guthis (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2015).

Thus, there is a very elaborate pattern of tasks and duties that give the elderly persons a standing and possibilities to participate. It also defines them in the context of their social and built habitat and turns them into care-takers of urban regeneration. But Bajracharya also indicates entrepreneurship:

These days, the tenants do not pay the paddy anymore. We still have some lands of the *bāhāḥ*. We sold a plot [...] to build the building from where the Sunrise Bank is operating now. We didn't have sufficient money so we took some loan from the Sunrise Bank itself to build the building. We still have some amount to pay the bank. And we get rents from the building too (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2015).

This allows for financing rituals and renovations, but also bears risks. A monastery like Ha:bāhāḥ conducts around thirty *pujas* at the site per year. Some are jointly organized by all *ājus*: "The senior most *āju* must perform all the *pujas*." Rajendra Shakya explains that there is more than ritual function to the activities of elderly men entitled *āju* in their neighborhood:

The getting together is also very important socially for these *ājus*. Along with the status of an *āju* comes respect in the society and, in most cases, the family too. Because the responsibilities of an *āju* usually pulls in his other family members too, who usually carry out ritual responsibilities. Some of them may take it as a burden but they do it; they may not like or want to do it, but they do it. And, more importantly, these extra engagements for the family members may also prevent maltreatment of the *āju*. Even a nuclear family of the *āju* will usually fulfill the responsibilities they inherit along with the induction of the elderly gentleman as an *āju* (in conversation with the author, September 2015).

This speaks of a certain form of social control since the obligation for family members for regular participation in rituals happens in a spatially densely woven neighborhood (most families share the same courtyard). This ensures that they pay attention to their status and relations. However, Shakya also stresses that most *ājus* are treated well at home. The moment an elderly person becomes an *āju*, he becomes a public figure, escapes the confines of the home and gains more opportunities to socialize, also with members of younger generations.

This is an interesting phenomenon that could be of interest to the WHO report for age-friendly cities, though here too, one learns that

voluntary services by older people have become a central part of active ageing and age-friendly cities' policies, as a means to keep them busy with a purpose. In this context, limited choice and access as to what one would like to engage in is often quoted as a challenge for these policies. Voluntary service is associated with civic participation in cities of the Global North. It is then applied to southern contexts too, but with little variation (and thus usually held in more affluent middle-class realms, and secular contexts). Thus it may sideline the resource of voluntary service such as *sevā* as a crucial aspect of religious everyday life, and it keeps people engaged and active, urging them to communicate and reflect the social ecology of their direct neighborhood and diverse forms of micro-communities.

## Honoring old age and ritualizing death

There are different ways of paying respect to old age in Newar rituals, and preceding death, there is a unique intergenerational ageing ritual among the Newars that marks the completion of a specific lifespan and a liminal, even risky moment transgressing to sanctification of the honored person. With the so-called *jya jamko* (or *janku*), an elderly person aged seventy-seven becomes a deity, and undergoes a set of rituals of appeasement (see von Rospatt 2014; Gutschow and Michaels 2005). The ritual must be initiated and conducted by the children and the most spectacular event is when a procession takes the celebrated persons on a palanquin or in a chariot, like a deity, through the old part of Patan, visiting important shrines and marking the city through the special ritual event.

But there are also attempts to introduce new rituals of honoring old age in Patan, through a more recent organization of the Senior Citizen society of Nepal. While ritual and old age are seen as activating resources, D.J. Sharma recalls that:

What we did was not a new thing. We only reformed the old tradition. We have the provision of *jhimha thakāli*.<sup>25</sup> [...] But that is only limited to some *bāhāḥ* or any *guthi*. What we did was we gathered senior citizens from all over Lalitpur. First we only took Newars, then we also included Brahmin/Chhetris. Then people from the village area also came. We did not categorize in terms of caste-based hierarchy (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

Less wealthy people, too, are sought to be included. G.M. Shrestha, another member of the senior citizen society states that the activities are decentralized so that even people who are not mobile can access meeting points. He seems to sense an interesting overlapping of scales:

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25 The ten elders of any *bāhāḥ*.



There has been a change in the way people view senior citizens these days. They take senior citizens as knowledgeable people. The recognition one gets is directly related to his contributions to society. So our rule is to be positive and make others positive too. This is just a part of a process. We used to have a lot of people sitting at public places (*phalcā*) and chatting. That has declined a lot. Gradually their economic level has gone up (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

This means that people with more wealth, for whom membership to class matters, might not find it appropriate any longer to spend time sitting in a *phalcā*.

Rituals of death are still of key importance, and one of the most important *guthis*, the *si-guthi*, is concerned with a *guthi* member's burial, ensures that the corpse is picked up by members of the *guthi* and accompanied to the burning grounds. Normally, it is the oldest son who has to lighten the funeral pyre, but K. R. Joshi also says that,

If I get sick, we have hospitals; if I die, we have the cremation ground and *guthi* as well. So what do I need them (the sons who live abroad) for? We have to be able to bring changes to everything according to the time. If we don't introduce changes, it will never continue (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

His friend Ram disagrees:

I don't think we need funeral *guthis* these days. Recently, I had my turn of organizing the *guthi*. It's not necessary anymore. Firstly, everyone is usually hospitalized these days. You can simply bring them from the hospital to the cremation ground (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

Kali adds:

The biggest defect in it is that they have not introduced any changes in the proceedings of the *guthi*. We are still going to the residence of the deceased, make *bier* there and take out the funeral procession. It's not feasible anymore. People have moved to new locations and it is not possible for the *guthi* to carry out the funeral process in the traditional manner (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

The adaptation now is that families are requested to bring the dead with a vehicle straight from the hospital. By now, hearses have been introduced too, making the presence of the company of community members who carry and accompany the body redundant. This comment also reflects the

urban transformation, where densely woven networks are shifted by introduction of new institutions (hospitals, old-age homes) and preferences of younger generations, even the aged persons themselves. The shift of institutions, social relations, and ritual practice is also mirrored in S. M. Joshi's reflection about modern old-age homes, of which there is barely a handful in Kathmandu Valley:

I am talking about Newar society. They have such a rich culture that there is no need for *br̥ddhāśrama* (old-age home). The sons and daughters spend so much money just to celebrate the *janku* of their parents. You know it, it's for the reputation. [...] In Kathmandu, they pull the chariot. But here in Patan, they put the chariot on the shoulder. They have a great respect. So there is no need for this *br̥ddhāśrama* (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, March 2015).

Carrying a chariot on shoulders indicates the divine status of the carried, and here refers to the divinization of elderly persons after they have reached the age of seventy-seven years, seven months, seven days, a "ritual birthday" known among the Newar as *janku* defined by astrologers and according to the moon calendar (see Gutschow and Michaels 2005; von Rospatt 2014). Interestingly, it is the children of the jubilees who must initiate the *janku*, and during my research I encountered stories about elderly who would have preferred not to be in the limelight as recipients of the ritual, but whose children were eager to conduct it in order to accumulate social prestige (as being particularly respectful and traditional), and to "pay back" the debts of having not looked after the parents well enough. *Janku* is particularly well-designed for social status as it allows for a memorable procession through the old city, with a chance for utmost public attention and gossip.

Alongside this view, R. P. Joshi, the program organizer of the Lalitpur (Patan) Senior Citizen society, supports the promotion of old-age homes in the neighbourhood, even if families are still predominantly looking after the elderly people. The association of farmers built an old-age home for members of their community in 2013. In 2017, they received financial support from the Indian government to make plans for a four-storey senior citizen home, hosting 110 senior citizens who have been abandoned or cannot be looked after by their families. The home is open to people regardless of their caste, sex, and economic status. The homepage of the *iyapu samaj* old-age home (*br̥iddhāśram bhavan*) announces: "With rapid urbanization and development, life of the senior citizens has been quite difficult and pitiful these days in Nepal."<sup>26</sup> As H. G. Dangol, member of the senior citizen society says when asked whether he would live in an old-age home:

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26 See <http://oldagehome.jyapusamaj.org.np/background/>, accessed May 26, 2018.

That's something to be thought about in the future. If the sons and daughters-in-law don't look after you, then the problem arises. I don't have such problems at the moment. There are many who don't look after the parents. For them, it is necessary. Another thing is, the view of the person who goes to live there—does he want to go there (in conversation with the author, January 2015)?

The need for old-age homes grows with increasing numbers of couples working, many of them abroad, thus being physically absent.<sup>27</sup> But in conversations it also became obvious that even if people would opt for such an institution, many did not even know the term “old-age home,” or that, and if so, where, it exists. As K.B. Maharjan says:

... there are old-age homes, but not around here. All such reforms and managements are good. But the problem is: only the people with connections have access to them. I don't have any. Who shall I approach? Even if there are people in need of it here, where do we go to get information? Those who have connections make the necessary arrangements for that, those who don't are left behind (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya and the author, March 2015).

This reference to an uneven distribution of information about official services for elderly people could be an issue taken up by stakeholders interested in the WHO age-friendly city report that defines communication and information as a right in an age-friendly city (WHO 2007: 60–62). There are civil organizations that look after—or “care” for—the rights and interests of senior citizens. The existence of a wide range of associations—such as *guthis*, but also senior citizen societies or Rotary Clubs—shape an atmosphere of participation, and they must not be played out against each other. One organization that particularly cares for a wider involvement of elderly persons maintaining the city's intangible heritage, is the Lalitpur Centre for Culture Conservation and Promotion (*Lalitpur Sanskriti Samvardhan Kendra*) that was formed under the initiative of the Senior Citizen Society, Lalitpur.<sup>28</sup> As R. P. Joshi, the program organizer of the Lalitpur Senior Citizen society, explains:

Our cultures are gradually dying. All of them—the dances and others as well. So, how do we stop it? I mean, stop the gradual death of cultures and, if possible, revive them. Hence, we formed the organization and we recently organized a program as well. This is a big issue, not an easy one to deal with. But still, we have to do it.

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27 This chapter cannot look into situations outside the Kathmandu Valley where whole villages struggle with the fact that mostly younger and even elderly men work outside the country, leaving behind parents, wives, and children.

28 See <https://www.facebook.com/LalitpurCulture/>, accessed February 10, 2020.

We have just started and there are a lot to be done. It's been only four to five months since we launched it. I'm very busy due to my involvement in plenty of things. I'm also in the Rotary Club and the Heart Foundation (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

For him, the "new" and the "old," religious and secular domains, can easily cling together, there is neither a need for "empty" citation on the basis of nostalgia nor reason for suspicion in "progress" per se. He supports the existence of semi-public places like *phalcā*, *bāhāh*, and *nani* (courtyard) and says that it is important because,

they sit and talk about all their feelings and it allows them to let it out. We need to have such a platform for all the senior citizens. We need to make such groups; there should be a place for bhajans as well. That will make them unaware of old age. Though when they go home, it'll be back to the same. But still, it is very important. We have to preserve it. We have also started *bhajan* here (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

*Bhajan* gatherings are organized in the society's office, with men and women coming together for two to three hours on Saturdays:

We have to do such things. Not just that, it can be playing or studying as well. If such things continue, people will not realize the passing of time. These are the things that we should think about for all. Just giving them food is not enough. Food is for physical strength but we should also think about mental health as well (in conversation with Rajendra Shakya, December 2014).

Against opinions that see old people as a burden to younger generations and even the state, I want to highlight voices raised across social strata that insist on perceiving elderly persons as an enriching and vibrant social and cultural resource for a city. A. Shrestha, Chief of the Social Welfare Division of Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Office tells Rajendra Shakya:

The senior citizens are a kind of challenge for the local (government and municipality) body. There are many target groups and the municipality has other responsibilities too. It is the responsibility of the government as well to honor the senior citizens. I feel that the government has failed to extract the knowledge for—and from—the senior citizens. Both the local and central government have failed to do that. Only they know our culture. We need attention and money from them—this will be crucial in the preservation of our culture. For that we need to introduce programs to motivate the elderly. We will also get old! If we don't leave behind the knowledge we have, it

will be of no news. Only then the future generation will benefit. We have to record their knowledge in written form. So I suggest that the foreigners who do research on the senior citizens, they should also find out what the elderly people know, instead of just talking about their current situation (February 2015).

This implicit critique of studies that do not turn towards experiences and oral histories of ageing generations might be wind in the sails of reports such as the WHO report on age-friendly cities. The comment underlines the notion of “caring cities,” of agents in the city who care for ageing well—across generations. Such a view seems relevant for the agenda of *elderscapes* and environmental gerontology that try to push beyond policy-oriented, and deficit and problem-solving approaches.

### To conclude ...

Environmental gerontology as well as the concept of *elderscapes* allow a multiscalar and multitemporal approach to study and analysis of the experiences of elderly people in an urban habitat that is changing dramatically. Concepts such as the age-friendly city can enrich the discussion, even though these must also be critically examined as tools for urban planning and development, particularly in the Global South. In that sense, the concept can well be enriched through an ethnographic perspective that highlights in what important ways an understanding of urban transformation and of *elderscapes* reflect and respond to each other. One way of doing so is by exploring the “urban code” of a neighbourhood (such as Old Patan) and see how familial, occupational, ritual, and ownership aspects matter not only for urban regeneration, but also for conditions and notions of ageing. Here, changing patterns of migration, education, globalized lifestyle, or political and civic life also need to be considered. This highly inter-relational and multi-scalar fabric of life in cities, and of ageing in cities, has often been sidelined in studies of urban ageing. Moreover, it receives a new dynamic if conducted in and from the so-called Global South, where demographic change and urban transformation take place and impact ageing more rapidly than, for instance, in the Global North. Old-age as urban caretaking—be it related to social or /and religious practice or cultural heritage, too, gains new meaning when alternative temporalities and forms of place-making must be recognized that complement, or even create tensions with, “secular,” developmentalist chronologies and notions of “public” space. This chapter has tried to shed light on this multi-level habitat of practice, event and agency with a particular focus on the cosmopolitan and “traditional” context of the old—yet transforming and “globalizing”—Newar city of Patan. It has thereby also uncovered the need for a morphology of dimensions such as “age-friendly”—and “caring” cities with respect to “regeneration” and “modernity” that must not necessarily

follow a linear model of “progress,” even though they are often impacted by experiences of globalization (e.g. in the case of transnational labor or education mobility), temporality, mobility and belonging, highlighting the productive dimensions of “peripheral” metropolitan environments such as Kathmandu Valley to research on ageing and urban transformation.

## Figures

Fig. 1: Photo by Christiane Brosius 2015.

Fig. 2–3: Photos by Christiane Brosius 2018.

Fig. 4: Photo by Christiane Brosius 2016.

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